



Billing Code: 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XC014

Marine Mammals; File No. 15777

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Woods Hole, MA (Responsible Party: Michael Simpkins), has applied in due form for a permit to take marine mammals during scientific research in coastal waters and adjacent waters off the northeast U.S.

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or e-mail comments must be received on or before [insert date 30 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting “Records Open for Public Comment” from the Features box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 15777 from the list of available applications.

These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the following offices:

Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301)427-8401; fax (301)713-0376;

Northeast Region, NMFS, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930; phone (978)281-9328; fax (978) 281-9394; and

Southeast Region, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, Saint Petersburg, FL 33701; phone (727)824-5312; fax (727)824-5309.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to (301)713-0376, or by email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tammy Adams or Amy Sloan, (301)427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.), and the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216).

The applicant requests a five-year permit to take harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina concolor*), gray seals (*Halichoerus grypus*), harp seals (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*), and hooded seals (*Cystophora cristata*) during conduct of research to estimate distribution and abundance, determine stock structure and habitat requirements, study foraging ecology, assess health and determine the effects of natural and anthropogenic factors on these seal species. Types of take include harassment during shipboard, skiff, and aircraft transect and photo-identification surveys, and scat collection; and capture with tissue sampling and instrument or tag attachment. The applicant proposes to capture up to 175 harbor seals and 225 gray seals annually for

measurement of body condition, collection of tissue samples (e.g., blood, blubber biopsy, skin, hair, swab samples, vibrissae), and attachment of telemetry devices. Up to 200 harp seals, 50 hooded seals, and an additional 18,000 harbor seals and 20,000 gray seals could be harassed annually incidental to surveys, scat collections and capture operations. The applicant requests unintentional mortality of up to 3 animals of each species annually. Permission is also sought to import and export pinniped specimen material (including soft and hard tissue, blood, extracted DNA, and whole dead animals or parts thereof) to/from any country. The study area includes waters within or proximal to the U.S. EEZ from North Carolina northward to Maine, and Canadian waters in the Gulf of Maine.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), an initial determination has been made that the activity proposed is categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Dated: May 1, 2012.

Tammy C. Adams, Acting Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2012-10847 Filed 05/03/2012 at 8:45 am; Publication Date: 05/04/2012]